



Struan Sutherland

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Obituaries

Struan Sutherland

An expert on venomous creatures and one of the great larrikins of Australian medicine

In a country famous for its deadly snakes and spiders, Struan Sutherland became a household name for his expertise on venomous creatures. He was also well known as one of the great larrikins of Australian medicine and as a prolific author.

While working at the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL), Sutherland led efforts to develop an antivenom to the Sydney funnel-web spider and revolutionised treatment of snake bites by developing the pressure-immobilisation first aid technique and venom detection kits.

After an acrimonious departure from CSL, Sutherland founded the Australian Venom Research Unit at the University of Melbourne's department of pharmacology in 1994, where he worked until retiring in 1999.

But Sutherland, who spent his final years battling a rare, degenerative brain disease—striatonigral degeneration—was writing until the end. The second edition of the textbook *Australian Animal Toxins*, which he co-wrote, was published several months before his death.

In typical Sutherland style, he wrote asking colleagues to review chapters of the text, offering a multiple choice reply. Recipients could tick either "send me a copy asap" or "stuff off."

Sutherland once said that what he enjoyed most about his work was advising colleagues. Many thousands of doctors rang him at all hours for help in emergencies.

He was a tireless writer, for professional and lay audiences, and even published a guide to hydroponic gardening, one of his many hobbies. He also wrote his own funeral



notice, announcing with characteristic dry humour that "Struan would like to inform his friends and acquaintances that he fell off his perch on Friday, 11th January, 2002." He was 65.

Sutherland left detailed instructions for his memorial service and wake, including that champagne and fruit cake were to be served. He asked his family to cater for 50—but 250 people packed the church.

It was typical of Sutherland, an enthusiastic cook and host, to put such thought into catering. His widely disseminated "rules of an amateur chef" included such advice as: "Never cook for or eat with anyone you loathe" and "Invite your guests early and try to kick them out by 10.30 pm before one or more of them become very boring, argumentative or critical of their host."

James Angus, professor of pharmacology at the University of Melbourne, told the service that Sutherland had left a lasting legacy in antivenom research. This was illustrated on the weekend after his death when 150 km of Queensland's beaches were

closed by the worst recorded plague of the tiny jellyfish *Carukia barnesi*. Its sting causes the Irukandji syndrome of intense pain and cardiovascular emergency.

"Struan urged us to research this venom and the Australian Venom Research Unit has just completed exciting research data that will soon be published," said Angus.

In the forward to his 1998 autobiography, *A Venomous Life*, Sutherland described autobiography as "an ideal vehicle for self-promotion and subtle shafting of one's enemies," and a large slab of his is devoted to describing his protracted disputes with CSL management.

The disputes centred around a clash of personalities and cultures—Sutherland's passionate commitment to his research versus CSL's lack of commitment to it at a time of increasing commercialisation. "Generally when I have got into trouble it is because unnecessary obstructions have been put in the way," wrote Sutherland, who was once described as having a "joyously combative personality."

He wrote of being suspended twice from CSL: once for calling the director a "swine," and then for throwing paper clips at another manager—both times in response to funding cuts.

Sutherland's observant, irreverent humour is on fine display in his autobiography, where he penned many a sharp portrait. Dr Michael Wooldridge, a former Australian health minister, is described as a "slightly obese but contented fox," and Sutherland was no less tough on himself, describing himself variously as stubborn, headstrong, short tempered and, when a new medical graduate, an "overconfident prig."

He leaves two children. [MELISSA SWEET]

Struan Sutherland, antivenom researcher and author; b Sydney 1936; q Melbourne 1960; AO, FRCPA, FRACP, MD, DSc; died from striatonigral degeneration on 11 January 2002.

Advice

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Anthony Charles William Mosbergen da Roza



Former orthopaedic surgeon Hong Kong (b Hong Kong 1932; q Hong Kong 1954; FRCS Ed; FRCS, MChOrth), died from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease on 27 November 2001.

He came to the United Kingdom after qualifying. In 1963 he moved to Western Australia, where he worked at Royal Perth Hospital for two years. He then returned to Hong Kong where he practised as a consultant in orthopaedic surgery. Honorary appointments there included president of the BMA Hong Kong branch from 1972 to 1974. He retired to the UK in 1984 and spent his last working years as honorary demonstrator of anatomy, University College and Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London, from 1987 to 1994. He leaves a wife, June; four children; and four grandchildren. [ANNA LINCH] ■+

Archibald Walter Forbes Erskine



Psychotherapist, formerly on staff of the West London Hospital (b 1918; q Oxford 1943), died on 13 January 2002 from bronchopneumonia after several small strokes.

The son of a missionary in South Africa, Archie moved to England after his father's death. After house jobs, he entered general practice, but became interested in psychotherapy, which was to be his life's work. He retired from private practice only after his first stroke at the age of 82. An enthusiastic glider pilot (his oldest child was taken aloft at the tender age of three weeks), he only finally gave up in his 60s to spend more time with his family. He leaves a wife, Therese; three sons; and five granddaughters. [JAMIE ERSKINE] ■+

Kenneth Boyd Fraser

Former professor of microbiology the Queen's University, Belfast (b 1917; q Aberdeen 1940; MC, MD, DSc, FRSE), d 17 July 2001.

Kenny served in the Royal Army Medical Corps during the second world war in the Chin Hills in Burma, where he was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry. After the war he joined the department of bacteriology at Aberdeen University before spending two years in Melbourne. These two years resulted in a brilliant series of genetic experiments on the influenza virus, which analysed recombination—and led to the prediction of the segmented genome—of the virus. He returned to academic life in the United Kingdom, and in 1966 he was appointed to the chair of microbiology at Queen's University, where he introduced immunology in both academic and clinical fields. This specialty was invaluable when he led a Medical Research Council programme into immunological aspects of the role of the measles virus in multiple sclerosis. His wife, Leslie, predeceased him. [MARGARET HAIRE, MORAG TIMBURY] ■+

James Munro Christie Gill



Former general practitioner Inverurie (b Bucksburn 1905; q Aberdeen 1927), d 28 December 2001.

His first taste of general practice was at Inverbervie, after which he purchased a practice in Inverurie, where he remained until retirement in 1967. When the NHS began in 1948 he served on various committees, including two years as president of the Scottish Association of Executive Councils. A lifelong member of the BMA, he served on the council of the Aberdeen and Kincardine division, and was elected a fellow. Outside medicine he had many interests, including scouting. He was a justice of the peace and served the Inverurie West Church for 55 years as deacon and elder. Predeceased by his wife, Mary, and a son, he leaves three children; and 12 grandchildren. [GEOFFREY M GILL] ■+

Alexander ("Sandy") James Gray

Former general practitioner Tasmania, Australia (b 1927; q Aberdeen 1953), d 22 October 2001.

Sandy trained as a commando in the Royal Marines, gaining the coveted green beret. An accomplished pianist, he played a leading part in student charity shows, composing much of the music and acting as musical director. After a spell in general practice in Burnley, Lancashire, the family emigrated to Australia in 1967. Sandy took early retirement because of advancing ill health, and he was severely disabled in his later years. He leaves a wife, Moira; and two sons. [WILSON McINTOSH] ■+

John Webb Hallewell



Former general practitioner Grimsby 1954-89 (b Halifax 1923; q Sheffield 1950), died from a malignant brain tumour on 19 December 2001.

In 1942 he joined a special unit trained for the invasion of Europe. He drove an amphibious tank in the first landing on Sword Beach on D-Day and was wounded in the assault on Caen. He spent two years as assistant in general practice in Bristol before joining a two man practice in Grimsby. As secretary of the local medical committee, he was highly supportive of his colleagues, especially those in singlehanded practice. A Rotary member from 1973, in 1995 he went to work as a volunteer in Uganda. Increasing deafness prevented him continuing this work. He leaves a wife, Doreen; three children; and four grandchildren. [ERIC CLOW, JOHN POTTER] ■+

Elizabeth Joan Harbott (née Bowen)

Former associate specialist in psychiatry Royal South Hants Hospital, Southampton (b Carmarthen 1933; q Cardiff 1957; MRCPsych, DPM), died at home from metastatic choroidal melanoma on 28 May 2001.

She had been exclusively Welsh speaking until she was 8 years old and was extremely proud of her Welsh heritage throughout her life. However, in 1963 she felt the urge to spread her wings and successfully applied for a fellowship in internal medicine in Washington DC. On her return to the United Kingdom she trained in psychiatry. She moved with her husband to Winchester in 1969, and took up a post in the new department of psychiatry at Southampton. She continued to work there as an associate specialist until she retired in 1991. She leaves a husband, Tony; and a son. [TONY HARBOTT] ■+